



The Transition Center at FSI

Overseas Briefing Center

Comprehensive Guidelines for OBC Post Videos: Video Content and Production

CONTENT

Audio visuals sell posts! Videos provide an excellent way to prepare the whole family for the realities of overseas life. Skeptical bidders often become more interested and enthusiastic after watching well-done post videos, positioning a post higher on their bid list.

OBC clients seek an orientation to what life will be like for them at post. Housing, schooling, shopping, recreational facilities, community life and a visual orientation to the city are the most important. The preferred finished length is 12-20 minutes. If you use the guidelines below as a checklist, your post video is guaranteed to be a success with bidders!

The most important guideline is to break your program into distinct sections to help viewers locate and focus on issues important to them:

- **City Overview.** Remember that general tourist information can be found elsewhere (YouTube, etc.) and should only be included as it affects life at post. Instead, include what would be the most interesting local scenes for those assigned to your post. For example: major thoroughfares or plazas, a view of the city from a high point or tall building, local festivals (brief), a park or two. Narrate what viewers are seeing, and describe typical weather, traffic, parking, and other vital information for day-to-day living in the city.
- **Housing.** This is the major topic for viewers, and the most important portion of a post video. Please devote substantial time to this subject. Show housing for entry-level, mid-level, and senior employees. Identify housing by position (never by occupant name) and type (U.S. Government-owned, leased, etc.) Even if housing changes frequently, it is important to include pictures of exteriors and interiors so that viewers have an idea of what they can reasonably expect. NARRATE all footage, describing typical features, differences from U.S. standards (appliances, storage space, high ceilings, flooring, layout, yard size), and location in travel time from work, shopping, and schools. Show tidy, lived-in (not vacant) properties. Temporary quarters, if used, should also be shown. Detailed treatment of the principal officer's residence is not necessary since it is likely to be available from FBO. However, a shot or two of the residence would be of interest to most viewers and therefore would be welcome.

- **Workplace Overview.** A very brief on-camera welcome is okay, otherwise no talking heads. This section should include: exterior views of embassy or consulate; a brief overview of separately located offices (such as USIS or USAID); and quick shots of the working environment within offices; CLO Office, medical facilities, cafeteria and other features of interest.
- **Shopping.** Briefly show typical shopping locations and explain what is and is not available with an emphasis on places where food is purchased. Included in this section are post commissary or U.S. military facility interior views; and local facilities, both modern and traditional.
- **Community Life.** Show the daily and leisure time activities available. This section might include brief narrated footage of recreational facilities (clubs, pools, sports facilities, etc.), places of worship, major cultural resources, restaurants, healthcare facilities if Americans use them, and common travel destinations (resorts, nearby cities, national parks). When possible, show Foreign Service employees and family members involved in these activities.
- **Schools.** Place this section LAST so that people without kids can skip it. Include narrated scenes of buildings, playgrounds, sports fields and facilities, a few sample classrooms, the library, and school activities in progress. If there is a choice of schools at post, brief views of all choices should be included, preferably showing students and teachers. Mention typical travel times, special features, programs of study, and other relevant facts. Children frequently visit the OBC with their parents, and footage of the school is extremely interesting to them.

POST VIDEO PRODUCTION

Whether you are updating an old video or creating a new one, we recommend that you view current post videos on the *OBC-BNET Post Videos on Demand* OpenNet website (http://bnet.state.gov/category.asp?category_id=146) for fresh approaches and techniques. Determine what's good, as well as what isn't and why. Look especially at the smaller posts' videos, which typically had to do more with less.

- Use on-screen titles (i.e., "Housing," "Schools") to introduce each section, identify speakers and locations, etc. Text should be large and simple for greatest legibility when viewed on-line.
- Use on-camera and voice-over narration throughout the entire video. Don't simply show footage with background music or leave gaps in narration.
- Spend adequate time on topics important to viewers. Do not use rapid-fire montages of housing or schools, for example.

- Try walking tours of buildings, living quarters, shopping areas, schools, etc. These can give viewers a first-hand look at pertinent locations, especially when accompanied by informal descriptive commentary by people associated with the site. If using a handheld camera, be sure any camera movements are smooth and spotlight important features. Do not use disorienting zooms.
- While motion video is preferred, montages of still photos of housing interiors and other static features can be employed if used sparingly and shot by an advanced amateur photographer. If the pictures are shot with a wide angle lens, editors can digitally pan and zoom within the images to create pleasing and informative shots.
- In each of the major subject areas, obtain and include brief interview/testimonial comments about first impressions, living conditions, traffic etc. These testimonials will enliven your video and have a great impact on viewers. Include comments on current issues of interest from employees' point-of-view, such as cell phone and home Internet service, housing trends, safety, transportation options, school programs, food-type availability, etc
- Maps can be used to show the relationship of housing to work, shopping locations, transportation routes, etc. However maps often have too much confusing detail, so they must be simplified, used sparingly, and accompanied by an explanation since viewers will most likely be unfamiliar with the post city.
- Don't date your video. If a "welcome statement" by the current ambassador must be included, isolate it in a way that allows it to be easily edited out at a later date. If there are anticipated features, such as buildings under construction or in the planning stage, provide the expected completion date rather than the time remaining until they become operational.

TECHNIQUES FOR BETTER VIDEO

Because the learning curve is steep (especially for digital editing and successfully outputting to DVD,) we strongly suggest using production professionals for principal photography and editing. You can still save money by providing stills and some video scenes shot by advanced amateurs at post.

Nonetheless, with decent low-cost equipment readily available and the price of software so low, going the do-it-yourself route is enticing. If you decide to take on the challenge, here are some simple techniques that will make a big difference in your final results.

Video

Most consumer camcorders and editing software can produce acceptable quality if the video is shot with the following points in mind:

- If possible, use a camera that allows YOU to choose the best setting, then lock the exposure and white balance before you hit the record button. When the exposure and white balance functions are set to Auto mode, the camera constantly changes exposure and color as it searches for what it thinks will be the best setting. This annoying surging is most evident when a camera shooting inside a room pans across bright windows, or pans across dark exteriors of buildings to bright sky.
- Most consumer camcorder lenses have a limited field of view, so purchase a wide-angle attachment. They're cheap and you'll find one handy when shooting housing interiors. Use a tripod whenever possible to reduce shakiness, especially during interviews.
- If you are going to edit with popular software program such as Windows Moviemaker or Adobe Premier Elements or Apple's iMovie, be sure your camcorder records on SD cards or other inexpensive media that allow easy file transfers to your computer.
- Stock footage of local scenes can be acquired from government tourist boards, travel agencies and cultural organizations. In most cases the only cost will be the time needed to contact the various agencies.

Audio

Clean audio devoid of background noise is critical to the effectiveness of video programs. Use a camcorder that permits you to input a cable to a separate microphone. This will allow you to use a clip-on microphone to give the voice prominence over environmental sounds during interviews and host stand-ups.

Listen carefully before shooting to ensure traffic, air conditioning or other environmental sounds won't intrude. Select another location, turn machines off, or wait until the lawnmower stops before continuing. Play back what you've just recorded to ensure the speaker's voice stands out and is not distorted. Fixing these audio problems during editing is usually impossible

When doing audio-only narration, record in a well-padded room to eliminate hollow sound. A carpeted bedroom on the non-traffic side of a house is ideal for this purpose.

During production, you will often come across street musicians, bands at events, etc. If you think what you are hearing would make a good addition to your video (as a music bed for a montage, for example), be sure to have the camera operator shoot the musicians and record the whole song from beginning to end to give your editor the most flexibility. Ask permission to record and use the music of course.

MUSIC, STILLS, VIDEO AND COPYRIGHT

Yes, you need permission and may need to pay fees to use video, stills and music from commercial sources. Since this can be a long and expensive proposition, here are options that video professionals normally employ.

Video/Stills

There are many sources of low or no-cost stock visuals that will save you time and add production value to your program. Start with your local and national tourist board to locate free video and images of places of interest. Go on-line to find low-cost still pictures that you can animate during editing. Since you won't be selling your video or using it for commercial purposes, stills from on-line sites that offer user-contributed stills will generally be very low cost.

Music

Never use popular commercial music in your video! Getting permission to use popular music from commercial entities is a long and expensive proposition. Instead, use music designed specifically for video productions. If you hire a video editor, the editor will have access to a reasonable-fee library of production music for you to select from during the editing process. The library may even include local themes played with traditional instruments. If you are editing the video in-house, search for low-cost production music or royalty-free music on-line. One source is <http://incompetech.com/music/royalty-free/>. There also may be low or no-cost options from local bands and folk groups – every musical group records their performances nowadays! Ask them directly or make contact through tourist boards or local talent agencies to acquire CDs or music files.

DELIVERY FORMAT

For submissions, the Overseas Briefing Center and BNET require a high-quality NTSC DVDs, the type that can be played on a home video player.

If you are editing a video on a computer, output it in DVD-Video format. This should be the highest quality possible. Do not submit a video file to OBC. Do not create chapter stops that would prevent the DVD from being able to play continuously from start to finish. After approval, your DVD will be duplicated at the audiovisual shop at FSI for use in the Overseas Briefing Center. One copy will be sent to BNET. BNET will encode the program for use on the Main State (HST) cable system, adding a graphic at the bottom of the screen identifying your post. At the same time, it will add the program to BNET's video on-demand archive.

If you must shoot and edit your video in PAL format, you must invest in a high-quality transfer to NTSC before sending it to OBC. Be aware that cheap transfers use lesser technology. While acceptable for home videos, the inexpensive transfer will not achieve the quality needed by BNET.

Also be aware that “burned” DVDs (as opposed to “stamped” Hollywood movie DVDs) are notoriously unreliable player-to-player. So when your project is complete and you are preparing to send the DVD off, please attempt to play it on several players. Do not send it on if there are any problems, as we will experience the same problems and reject the submission.

TRANSCRIPTS AND CAPTIONING

To conform to Section 508 requirements for the hearing impaired, the Overseas Briefing Center will provide “captioning services” for you, but *only if the proper video and text formats are delivered*.

Your video must be submitted as a NTSC-format DVD as described in the *Delivery Format* section of these instructions. This DVD will be used to create the captioned version.

You must also submit a text file in Microsoft Word with the exact spoken text from the video. The formatting of this document must be exactly as specified here: Only the spoken words should be included -- all narration, interviews, speeches, etc. The document file should not include any headings, titles, descriptions or identification of who is speaking. Only include the words that will appear on-screen as captions. What you provide will be used exactly as submitted.

THANK YOU

On behalf of the foreign affairs community – employees and family members – OBC thanks you for providing a view of your post through real live footage! If you have further questions, please contact the Overseas Briefing Center at FSIOBCInfoCenter@state.gov or call 703-302-7276 (EST).